

**NASA Jet Propulsion Laboratory Space Station Utilization Team historical documents,**  
Provided to the Internet Archive by Randy Cassingham, 2023

I was hired into JPL's Systems Analysis Section in early October 1986 specifically to work on the Space Station Project, which was originally budgeted at \$8 billion and scheduled at that time to start launch/assembly Real Soon Now.

The problem was, the Space Shuttle *Challenger* explosion in January 1986 grounded the Shuttle, which was to be used for the assembly operations in part to justify its existence — and there was no clear “Return to Flight” date. (That finally happened with STS-26 in September 1988). The first Space Station launch was on 20 November 1998 (after I left JPL in 1996 to work full time on This is True), and it wasn't ready to be manned until nearly two years later.

JPL, which normally does unmanned missions (such as *Voyager* and *Galileo*), was brought in to do quite a bit of planning work, particularly around “utilization” — what would scientists *do* with the Station? My primary task was to write and publish the “Introduction to Utilizing the Space Station” — a guide for scientists to describe the Station's infrastructure and resources available to accommodate their experiments.

Every time I had a new “final draft” ready for review and publication, I'd send it to NASA Headquarters, which would respond that the Station was being redesigned to a new “baseline” to stay within the ever-growing budget, so I was directed to re-draft the document with the new specifications and send that in when ready. I found one such draft, dated 15 April 1988, and a scan of that is also in this archive. It is perhaps notable in that I insisted that it included an acronym list — NASA has always loved its acronyms! — as well as a good glossary.

That delivery/redraft cycle was repeated many, many times until my boss, Robert L. Staehle (who I would work with again later on the Mission to Pluto Preproject that became the *New Horizons* mission), directed me to fly to NASA Headquarters with all of the document files and ask that we be released from the task. And by the way, can we keep the rest of the budget to work on other stuff? Somehow I pulled that off, but that's a different story....

## **With That, the Memos**

Rob ran the Space Station Utilization Team at JPL, and had a staff meeting every Monday to gather information on “what was really going on” in the program, as well as get updates on the various tasks that he was managing. At some point (almost certainly before 29 February 1988), Rob assigned me to take notes for these meetings and publish them as memos to the entire team, plus his bosses (JPL had a space station program management office in Reston, Va., called “PR&A” — Program Requirements and Administration, I think), and anyone else who wanted to be on distribution.

That distribution was generally around 100 people ...directly. There was a secondary distribution by photocopies, and — once I started sending copies by “NASAmail”, a private-labeled version of Telenet's Telemail email system also in use by NASA — it was easily forwarded, and was. I learned that the memos were circulating as high as the White House since it was Rob's policy that everyone reported *what was really happening* with the program rather than the happy-talk bullshit political operatives thought their bosses wanted to hear.

It wasn't until much later that, after thinking about it, I realized why Rob had *me* doing the minutes: if some higher-up at NASA or in the political establishment objected to The Truth being published, he had a plausible deniability — that his underling misunderstood something and he'll get that fixed. I wasn't exactly a sacrificial lamb, since I think he'd protect me, but as far as I know he was never criticized for it.

(Just-before-shipping addition: I was in Pasadena and had dinner with Rob, and he confirmed that was essentially true.)

Sometimes if I was on travel someone else would do the minutes, and a copy of what they did is included in the archive if I had it, but there were generally done by me. I don't know when they actually started or when the series ended: all I know was when I was moving out of my house in 2023, I found some boxes of my JPL files in my garage, and by then it was easy to run them through a document scanner. They are dated 29 February 1988 to 15 July 1991. There may have been more, but these are the full extent of what I have.

And by the time I found them in my garage, I had been donating money now and then to the Internet Archive, and decided to place the scans there in hopes that some historian at some point studying the creation of what became the International Space Station would find them of interest in that they are actual contemporary NASA historical documents, rather than part of the filtered narrative created after the fact.

## Other Documents

During that time the SS Utilization Team also created a number of "Space Station Utilization Studies" — concept about what kinds of things could be done as experiments to show just how helpful it would be to have a manned platform in space. I was the editor and publisher of all of these studies and thought I had copies, but I didn't find them in my boxes. I'm continuing to try to locate copies of these:

- 28 Oct 1988 Tropical Rain Mapping Radar (JPL D-5904), Eastwood Im, et al.
- 1 Nov 1988 Circumstellar Imaging Telescope Experiment Lifecycle (JPL D-5903), Steven H Pravdo.
- 1 Nov 1988 A Large Deployable Reflector Assembly Scanario (JPL D-5942), M.J. Mahoney, et al.
- 1 Nov 1988 Solar System Exploration Mission Staging (JPL D-5974), Paul K. Henry, et al
- May 1989 Space Station Accommodations for Station Keeping Platform Operations, Paul K. Henry (JPL D-6559?), et al.
- August 1989 Extending Space Station Payload Life (Options for Design and Operational Strategies) (JPL D-6559?), Kristan Lattu, et al.
- May 1989 Space Station Freedom Attached Payload Accommodation Strategies (JPL D-6560), Paul K. Henry, et al.
- Aug 1989 Contamination of the Space Station Environment from STS Proximity Operations (JPL D-6658), Jerry M. Millard, et al.
- Nov 1989 Planetary Exploration Departures from the Space Station: Trajectory Effects on Station Operations (JPL D-6896), Paul K. Henry, et al.
- Oct 1990 Guidelines for the Classification of Space Station Freedom Laboratory Support Equipment and General Laboratory Support Facilities (JPL D-7976), Kristan Lattu, et al.
- Nov 1990 Freedom Assembly Sequencing Tool (FAST) Prototype (JPL D-8042), C. Borden, et al.

(Most have “A Space Station Utilization Study” as a series title)

Also included in this archive are two of the documents I wrote during that period:

- Space Station User Documentation: Lessons from the Space Shuttle (JPL D-4487), 30 Jun 1987
- Preliminary Space Station User Operations Interface Plan (JPL D-4887), 1 Oct 1987

As all of these documents were created by agencies of the U.S. Government with tax funds, and have never been classified at any level — they are in the public domain.

Randy Cassingham  
Contact: [ThisIsTrue.com](http://ThisIsTrue.com)  
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